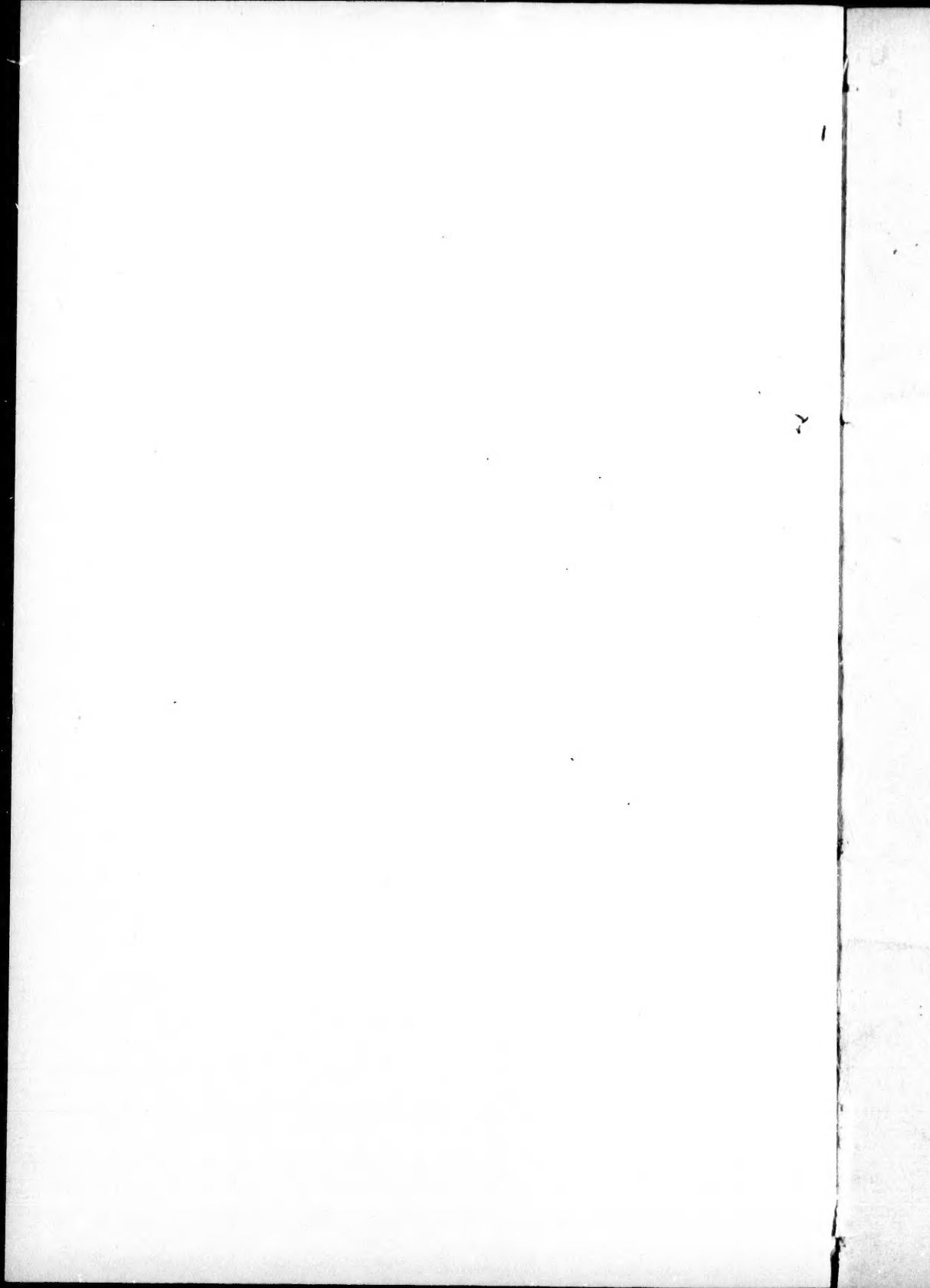




THOUGHTS

UPON

THE LAWFULNESS AND EXPEDIENCY

OF

Church Establishments;

AND

SUGGESTIONS FOR THE APPROPRIATION OF THE

CLERGY RESERVES

IN UPPER CANADA,

AS FAR AS RESPECTS THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND:

IN A LETTER

TO

C. A. HAGERMAN, ESQ. M. P.

SOLICITOR GENERAL OF UPPER CANADA.

BY THE REV. A. N. BETHUNE,

RECTOR OF COBOURG, AND CHAPLAIN TO THE LORD BISHOP OF
QUEBEC.

COBOURG:

R. D. CHATTERTON, PRINTER.

1836.

TO C. A. HAGERMAN, ESQ. M. P.
&c. &c. &c.

SIR,

For the liberty which considerations of personal friendship would scarcely embolden me to take in addressing this Letter to you without the formality of first soliciting your permission I shall waive any apology, from a persuasion that your standing in our Legislative assembly and especially your undaunted and consistent advocacy of the principles which these pages embody almost compel it as a public duty.

I am aware that the subject on which I am addressing you will shortly come under the grave deliberations of that enlightened and patriotic body; and I am persuaded that there are amongst its members many gentlemen who, anxious as they may be for the settlement of this agitating question, would at the same time never surrender the honest determination to consult the truest interests of their country, both present and prospective, in the decision which they may be called upon to adopt. With these impressions I shall not, I trust, be deemed presumptuous in believing that they will not regret the present ef-

fort to lay open the grand foundation upon which the merits of this important question ought to be considered to rest, nor to be reminded of the high and indestructible principles connected with this subject which no considerations of local or temporary expediency should ever persuade them to abandon.

I hope, Sir, I shall be acquitted of any other motive in the present attempt than the simple desire of stating what I conceive to be founded upon the immutable principles of truth, and what I believe to involve the dearest and most permanent interests of this our rising country. With an inward consciousness of this rectitude of intention I proceed fearlessly to the task; feeling at the same time the cheering conviction that the thoughts which will be brought to bear upon this most important subject of your legislative deliberations will, by the great body of your fellow-representatives, be accepted not only without prejudice but with an honest resolution to be guided by whatever may appear to be the force of truth, the claims of justice, or the demands of the real interests of this our common country.

In pursuing the train of reflections which this important subject suggests, we are led, I conceive, naturally to the consideration of two prominent points:—

I. The authority for ecclesiastical establishments from Scripture and reason; and

II. The various popular objections which are entertained against such establishments.

I. Reverting to the beautiful Scriptural narrative of the discovery and rescue of the infant

Moses by the daughter of Pharaoh, and to her charge to his unknown mother to nurse the child for her and she would pay her wages, a small and unpretending tract with which I chanced lately to meet draws a very striking analogy between this circumstance and the duty of a State or Government in relation to the spiritual nourishment of the millions who may perhaps compose the subjects of its rule. On the part of the State we can conceive it to be an obvious duty to delegate the charge of that most essential instruction to competent individuals, in language of precisely the same import as that which the sacred narrative furnishes ; "Take these children, and nurture them for me, and I will give thee thy wages." The duty of a State to provide religious instruction for its subjects is certainly as strong as the undoubted obligation to establish rules for the security of national virtue and morality. The benefits of law and the preservation of the advantages of ordinary justice depend much for example upon the sacredness which the public mind attaches to an oath ; but as this cannot be expected to prevail without the existence of some antecedent religious belief, the insisting upon the former by the State without a provision at the same time for the maintenance of the latter, cannot but strike us as an inconsistency.

From such an inconsistency, however, the history of mankind clearly proves that the human mind has ever revolted. The spontaneous approbation of government and order which is inherent in men had been applied as early and as strongly to ecclesiastical as to civil politics ; for no sooner did they discover the need of a legal establishment for the preservation of their social interests than they adopted the auxiliary of a na-

tional religion for the security of pious obligation and of moral restraint.

And the process was simple and the conclusion natural :—

In every family, especially in every Christian family, there is a species of religious establishment which embraces all its members under its jurisdiction. We do not abandon a child to spontaneous instruction, nor do we leave him to glean as he can his own religious faith :—we teach him the method of serving God according to *our own persuasions* of its propriety ; and although the time may arrive when he will depart from that particular line of religious instruction ; although we may even foresee the possibility of his future dissent from the main principles of our present tuition ; still we feel it a duty to furnish him with that instruction and to insist upon his conformity as long as his state of tutorage endures.

The analogy will hold in that greater family, the State. This evidently has a claim to a similar guidance and control ; and recognizing, as it must, the duty of supplying that instruction, it has a right to assume the same general authority as to the *manner* and *matter* of instruction. We would not suppose that when the father of a family had, by increase of population, become head of a village or governor of a tribe, he would be expected to withdraw the sanction which he had formerly given to the worship of God, lest his public capacity should vitiate what before was lawful in his private one. For instance, when Abraham by attention to this duty gained so express a commendation from God, we are not to believe that, when his household would have become so numerous or his other employments so

pressing as to have precluded the practicability of his personal teaching, he would have been violating any rule of Scripture or any dictate of his conscience in providing suitable religious teachers for them, in the terms of the language already quoted ; " Take these children and instruct them for me, and I will give thee thy wages."

These, I contend, are the dictates of nature ; nor are they without the sanction of *divine authority*. The Almighty, so far from forbidding the interference of the civil government with his Church, expressly enjoined such ordinances in the case of the Jews as served to form a national establishment of religion ; so that, by *divine command*, we have in that instance a religious establishment connected and even incorporated with the State. It is certainly not too much to assume that—until contradicted—this command, if it does not strictly *bind* all future generations, will at least most powerfully sanction their adoption of the same practice. Any economy which can lay claim to a divine origin must be held to involve at least some few universal principles convertible, with due modification, to other instances ; and—to adduce the testimony of a Dissenter—it is impossible to admit the divine origination of the Mosaic scheme, and at the same time to affirm that its fundamental principles are out of harmony with human nature, and not in any sense capable of extension from one people and age to another.* Nor is it less certain that, so far from any violence being done to the opinions and prejudices of mankind in that instance, the establishment of the Jewish religion was merely in consonance with sentiments and a practice pre-

* Spiritual Despotism, by the Author of the Nat. Hist. of Enthusiasm, p. 85.

viously and universally prevailing. This consideration will meet the objection, if advanced, that the Jews were under a theocracy, and that therefore the system adopted in their case was inapplicable to other forms of government ; while its force will be further diminished from the fact that under the judges and the kings, and even under the control of a foreign power, the principle and most of the details of the Jewish hierarchy remained unimpaired.

To the validity of the principle embraced in the national establishment of the Jews we are furnished with a satisfactory testimony from our Saviour himself. He uniformly joined in and upheld, both by his precepts and example, the services which that establishment provided ; and even if he had offered no *positive* sanction from his general conversation and practice, his having expressed no disapprobation of either its soundness or its utility could not but be construed into an argument in its favour. In common phraseology, his *silence* upon the subject would have amounted to *consent*.

There is often an argument attempted to be adduced against the connection of the Christian Church with the State from the expression of our Saviour when arraigned before the tribunal of Pilate, " My kingdom is not of this world." These, however, are words clearly inapplicable to the subject for which they are so frequently advanced. The correct and natural interpretation is evidently contained in the following paraphrase upon the passage by Dr. Doddridge, himself a Dissenter, and therefore in the present instance a very impartial authority : " Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world, nor is it my business or design to erect a temporal

dominion, and to establish any claim which should at all interfere with that of Cæsar, or of which any prince has reason to be jealous: indeed, if I should have entertained such views, I might have found support and encouragement from the very persons who are now my accusers: and if I had asserted that my kingdom was of this world, and had favoured such methods of defence, my servants, who professed of late so great and so public a regard to me, would resolutely have fought that I might not have been delivered to the Jews, or would attempt even now to rescue me out of their hands: but now my kingdom is not from hence, nor to be erected here; and therefore I have been so far from arming my followers with secular weapons, that the guard, who came to apprehend me, know that I forbade their making any use of those they had."

In regard to our Lord's inspired Apostles, it is manifest that they said not a word *against* religious establishments; and as the prejudices of mankind were in favor of such a system, and as these undoubtedly comported with their own views and opinions, it was unnecessary for them to say a word in their *defence*: but it would have been their duty to have condemned them in express terms had it been their impression that it was the meaning or intention of their heavenly Master to forbid the application to his religion of this universal practice of Jews and Gentiles.

From the first rise of Christianity to the reign of Constantine no opportunity was presented of introducing that connection of the Church with the State; but in the case of this emperor it was done, and that without a word of objection from the Christian teachers of the time or the citation of any scriptural or traditionary authority to re-

present it as incompatible with the tenets of their religion or with those of its founder and first propagators.

Had the Jews, indeed, by the conversion for instance of their Sanhedrim, chanced to have embraced Christianity as a nation, is any thing more natural than that they would have placed the new religion upon the same temporal footing as had been the one which it superseded? Or, to take another example, had king Agrippa been induced by the preaching of St. Paul to have yielded a full assent to the truths of which he was partially convinced, is any thing more natural than the belief not only that he would have been inclined but encouraged to direct to the propagation and establishment of Christianity all the power and influence which, from his situation, he commanded? The same impression and conduct would have been equally natural in the imperial master of the Roman world himself, had *he* been the convert to apostolic teaching;—he undoubtedly would then, as Constantine did afterwards, have raised the Christian religion to that rank in his favour and influence which the renounced rights and worship of paganism had formerly enjoyed. Pious rulers, in short, under the New Testament dispensation would naturally and justly appropriate to themselves the duties and responsibilities enjoined under the Old;—they would take it for granted that they were to be “nursing fathers and nursing mothers” to the Church of whose truth they were convinced and whose tenets they embraced. A national Church, as applicable to Christianity, had even been alluded to as early as the days of Irenæus, more than a century before the reign of Constantine; and so far from its presenting any contradiction to the Christian mind, it may be considered as a

natural expansion of the first rudiments of external Christianity, and as a virtual fulfilment of the command, "Forsake not the assembling of yourselves together."*

While there can be no denial of the fact that all States and people, in every age,—wherever at least there prevailed the belief of superior beings and the persuasion of a future state of rewards and punishments—had an established religion; it is no slight diminution of the force of the arguments *against* establishments that the innovation upon the system has been comparatively recent and partial. Such innovation was not the sentiment of the Reformers in the sixteenth century; neither of Calvin, nor Beza, nor Cranmer, nor Ridley, nor Knox; nor had the opposition to establishments assumed any formidable front until the times of the French Revolution, when, as is well known, the hostility that was manifested was the result of open and avowed infidelity. An eloquent and philosophic statesman had reminded the reckless innovators of those times, that "people who never look back to their ancestors will not look forward to posterity;" for in making this retrospection they cannot fail to discover that "all nations have begun the fabric of a new government or the reformation of an old, by establishing originally, or by enforcing with greater exactness, some rites or other of religion."†

But religious establishments, possessing as they do the authority of revelation and the inherent approbation of men in every age, cannot be without some obvious arguments in their favor from *practical expediency*. Mankind must have

* See Scriptural Despotism, p. 99.

† Burke's Letter on the French Revolution.

discerned their *benefit*, to have thus universally adopted them ; and this benefit must have been admitted by the divine wisdom, when they gained His express sanction in the case of the Jews.— This position I may repeat in the words of the excellent Wilberforce ; “ The tendency of religion to promote the temporal well-being of political communities is a fact which depends on such obvious and undeniable principles, and which is so forcibly inculcated by the history of all ages, that there can be no necessity for entering into a formal proof of it. It has indeed been maintained not merely by schoolmen and divines, but by the most celebrated philosophers and moralists and politicians of every age.”*

Wollaston, in his *Religion of Nature*, demonstrates that were it not for that sense of virtue which is principally preserved, as far as it is preserved, by *national forms and habits of religion*, “ men would soon lose it all, run wild, prey upon one another, and do what else the worst of savages do.” This discernment of the advantages of religion to a State, and of the deplorable effects of its absence would at once have dictated, as by the voice of nature, its *connection* with the civil institutions. It is the argument of the philosophic Warburton,† which reason better supports than some other of the theories of his gigantic mind, that as the care of the *civil* society, abstractedly considered, has reference only to the affairs of the body, and the care of the *religious* society only to those of the soul ; the civil power, to obtain the more direct benefit of the influence of religion, would naturally seek an union or alliance with the ecclesiastical. But

* Practical View, chap. 6.

† Divine Legation of Moses.

as, abstractedly, they have separate provinces, it does not seem that there can be any combined action between them or any mutual influence produced unless by *association*.

The advantages of the alliance of religion to a State are apparent, in strengthening, by its natural influence, the sanctions of law and of promoting a spirit of general subordination; while a disadvantage, as the consequence of their separation, is equally apparent from the collisions which, in that event, would sometimes necessarily arise. As the influence of religion touches the mind at all points, it becomes an influence which, if the State cannot gain to its side, it will assuredly view with jealousy. This would necessarily awaken and bring into collision two powerful antagonist principles; and the operation of the contest must inevitably be to weaken or corrupt on the one hand, or to produce insubordination on the other. It has been clearly established by a writer already quoted,* that the effect of this separation and mutual jealousy between the ecclesiastical and civil government of the Jews in the time of our Saviour, when the subjugation of the country by the Romans did not allow the proper operation of the alliance between them, was the source of most of the religious corruption as well as of the popular tumults of which those unhappy times were so rife. The conclusion from this argument I cannot better express than in the words of the same writer,† that “a well adjusted Church and State polity recommends itself in this special respect—as an arrangement which provides against ordinary occasions of concussion, and as immensely better

* See Spirit. Despotism, p. 88

† Ibid, p. 178.

than the leaving two potent principles open to every casualty that may throw them rudely one upon the other." It may be added that the protection of religion by the State, on the principle of a national Establishment, serves to guard the great defences of Christianity from external violence, while at the same time it helps to break the force of, by diminishing the motives to, internal dissention.

But to return to the more direct and positive advantages of this alliance of the spiritual with the civil power ;—an Establishment of religion provides the only certain means of conferring upon a nation the benefits of religion at all, at least of rendering them generally accessible or extensively permanent. Without the provision for its maintainance furnished by the State, a vast majority of a nation must be deprived of any certain or regular religious instruction ;—the remote and sequestered population, without the means as it were of purchasing these advantages, would never be adequately or permanently furnished with them by the operations of a spontaneous zeal.

Admitting, what may safely be assumed, that Christianity cannot be upheld or propagated without a standing ministry ; and that a ministry who shall possess all the diversified acquirements essential, as a general rule, to the successful dissemination as well as defence of Christianity, must possess a leisure and opportunity for study and action, with which no secular occupation would be compatible ; it seems plainly demonstrable that *voluntary contributions* can never supply the means of maintaining and perpetuating a body of men of this order. " To the scheme of voluntary contribution there exists this insur-

mountable objection," says Paley, "that few would ultimately contribute any thing at all.—However the zeal of a sect, or the novelty of a change, might support such an experiment for a while, no reliance could be placed upon it as a general and permanent provision. If by declining to frequent religious assemblies, men could save their money, at the same time that they indulged their indolence, and their disinclination to exercises of seriousness and reflection; or if, by dissenting from the national religion, they could be excused from contributing to the support of the ministers of religion, it is to be feared that many would take advantage of the option which was thus imprudently left open to them, and that this liberty might finally operate to the decay of virtue, and an irrecoverable forgetfulness of all religion in the country. Is there not too much reason to fear, that if it were referred to the discretion of each neighbourhood, whether they would maintain amongst them a teacher of religion or not, many districts would remain unprovided with any? That, with the difficulties which encumber every measure requiring the co-operation of numbers, and where each individual of the number has an interest secretly pleading against the success of the measure itself, associations for the support of christian worship and instruction would neither be numerous nor long-continued? The devout and pious might lament in vain the want or the distance of a religious assembly; they could not form or maintain one, without the concurrence of neighbours who felt neither their zeal nor their liberality."*

What immediately follows from this able writer is so extremely in point, that I cannot refrain

* Moral Philosophy, Book 6. Chap. 10.

from further quotation: "From the difficulty with which congregations would be established and upheld on the *voluntary* plan, let us carry our thoughts to the condition of those who are to officiate in them. Preaching, in time, would become a mode of begging. With what sincerity, or with what dignity, can a preacher dispense the truths of Christianity, whose thoughts are perpetually solicited to the reflection how he may increase his subscription? His eloquence, if he possess any, resembles rather the exhibition of a player who is computing the profits of his theatre, than the simplicity of a man who, feeling himself the awful expectations of religion, is seeking to bring others to such a sense and understanding of their duty as may save their souls. Moreover, a little experience of the disposition of the common people will in every country inform us, that it is one thing to edify them in Christian knowledge, and another to gratify their taste for vehement, impassioned oratory; that he, not only whose success, but whose subsistence depends upon collecting and pleasing a crowd, must resort to other arts than the acquirement and communication of sober and profitable instruction. For a preacher to be thus at the mercy of his audience; to be obliged to adapt his doctrines to the pleasure of a capricious multitude; to be continually affecting a style and manner neither natural to him, nor agreeable to his judgment; to live in constant bondage to tyrannical and insolent directors; are circumstances so mortifying not only to the pride of the human heart, but to the virtuous love of independency, that they are rarely submitted to without a sacrifice of principle, and a deprivation of character;—at least it may be pronounced, that a ministry so degraded would soon fall into the lowest hands; for it would be found

impossible to engage men of worth and ability in so precarious and humiliating a profession."

The answer that may be given to these observations that a high standard both of learning and piety, in ministers and people, prevails amongst many of those who dissent from the Established Church, is met by the consideration that the learning thus acquired is owing, primarily and essentially, to the existence of such an establishment, and the piety that subsists to the religious taste which has been fostered and maintained through the same influence. A national establishment produces the condition of things which gives success to the ministrations of dissenters ;—it constitutes, as it were, a standing fund from which dissenters, for purposes of literature or of the more internal interests of the common cause, can always draw. Such an objection cannot therefore be admitted as valid in countries where religious establishments exist ;—no, not even in the United States of America, which, altho' they have no national church supported by law, are in the condition of a body enjoying the benefits of the Established Churches of Great Britain.—Sprung from the same source, speaking the same language, and having access, by constant intercourse, to all the advantages which, through the instrumentality of those establishments, have been provided, they may fairly be said to be comprised within the compass of that influence which the national churches of Great Britain naturally exert.

Should it be affirmed that the voluntary contributions of the rich and pious, when thrown into the hands of some religious association uncontrolled by the State, would suffice for the supply of the spiritually destitute in their respective

countries, we reply that, while the specific provision which the State affords is undoubtedly preferable to contributions which must necessarily be so mutable and precarious as these, the means of religious ministrations thus furnished leave to the pious and benevolent another important field for the operations of their bounty which does not come so directly within the province of a government,—the diffusion of true religion amongst the unconverted heathen. Besides, the very existence of such associations, whether for foreign or domestic purposes, furnishes an obvious argument in favor of the principle of Establishments;—at least they concede the full force of the argument advanced by the advocates of establishments that direct voluntary contributions will not suffice for the religious instruction of a people; and they certainly yield to them the admission that an extraneous provision, one which the population benefited have no share in furnishing, is not as a general principle to be repudiated.

I shall conclude this branch of our argument in the forcible language of Dr. Chalmers: "It is perhaps the best among all our more general arguments for a Religious Establishment in a country, that the spontaneous demand of human beings for religion is far short of the actual interest which they have in it. This is not so with their demand for food or raiment or any article which ministers to the necessities of our physical nature. The more destitute we are of those articles, the greater is our desire after them. But the case is widely different when the appetite for any good is short of that degree in which that good is useful or necessary: and above all, when just in proportion to our want of it, is the decay of our appetite towards it. Now this is, gene-

rally speaking, the case with religious instruction ; the less we have of it, the less we desire it. It is not with the aliment of the soul as it is with the aliment of the body.—The latter will be sought after ; the former must be offered to a people whose spiritual appetite is in a state of dormancy, and with whom it is just as necessary to create a hunger as it is to minister a positive supply. In these circumstances, it were vain to wait for any original movement on the part of the receivers : it must be made on the part of the dispensers. Nor does it follow that because Government may wisely abandon to the principle of demand and supply all those interests where the desires of our nature and the necessities of our nature are adequate the one to the other, she ought therefore to abandon all care of our interest, when the desire on the part of our species is but rare and feeble and inoperative ; while the necessity is of such a deep and awful character that there is not one of the concerns of earthliness which ought for a moment to be compared with it."

II. I now proceed to the consideration, as proposed, of various popular objections entertained against Religious Establishments.

The objections to Religious Establishments—and it is certainly an advantage which their assailants, like those who assume the side of opposition in general, possess—are usually accompanied with those professions of moderation and liberality which so much favour the native propensity of mankind to liberty and indulgence.—Here, however, it should not be forgotten by those who may be imposed upon by such a disguise that the same method has ever been adopted; and that it has always proved the one most

successfully employed by the enemies of Divine Revelation itself.

The grand objection to Religious Establishments is founded upon the charge of the corruptions in Christian faith and practice which such establishments are said to have induced. Were we to admit the truth of this accusation, and push the objection to establishments of religion which, on that ground, is assumed, we should find ourselves obliged to arraign the wisdom even of certain Divine appointments: for such an objection would be applicable, in all its condemnatory effect, as much to the Jewish Church established by God himself, as to any other constituted after the same model. The Church of Judea, we ascertain from history, was by no means free from some corruptions and defects, induced by the degeneracy of the people;—these, undoubtedly, the Divine Wisdom foresaw, and many cautions were, at various times, given against the very depravations which arose;—yet had it been foreseen or certain that an establishment of religion was *peculiarly* or *necessarily* productive of that effect, the Jewish Church, we must believe, would never have been placed in a condition which involved its own corruption and overthrow. The causes, therefore, of corruption and in particular instances of decay, are no more in the Christian Church than in the Jewish to be ascribed to the natural or necessary operations of an establishment. Where such corruptions arise, we must refer them, not to the injurious working of that principle, but either to internal causes involved in the frailty or bad passions of man, or to external circumstances wholly separated from any necessary influence which an establishment exerts. “It must needs be that offences come,” is a declaration from infallible lips which,—re-

erring to its proper cause, the corruption of the human heart—will better account for the errors and decays of Churches than any of the modern accusations against establishments which have neither the support of philosophic argument, nor the testimony of practical experience.

It has been said, with the same specious manner of reasoning which so often captivates and deludes the unthinking, that God ever watches over and protects his church, and that, with such a guarantee for its security and maintenance, it needs not the adventitious defences which an establishment provides. To this we reply that, although every thing we possess is dependent, primarily, upon the providence of God, we are not only not precluded from the exercise of the obvious means of their attainment, but are even commanded industriously to apply those efforts which, with the Divine blessing, will produce such results. Although the husbandman, without the showers and sunshine of heaven, cannot hope for the abundance of harvest, his dependence upon an unseen power for that result never, surely, diminishes his own diligence in cultivating the land; nor does he deem it less necessary to enclose his growing crop from the depredations of neighboring cattle. While, therefore, we look to the divine blessing as indispensable for the prosperity of religion, we must ourselves labour, by the best and most efficacious means, for its dissemination and maintenance; as well as guard it from external violence or the destroying influence of internal dissention by every bulwark which, consistently with divine revelation, human skill can employ. The propagation of religion, if not to be adequately effected by the operations of a spontaneous zeal, must be ensured by the more powerful means of a State

provision, and the uniformity and purity of religion maintained by those safeguards which an establishment most effectually provides.

But to return to the specific charge of corruption as induced by establishments, and that especially the corruption of the Christian Church commenced with its establishment by Constantine, —we can safely combat the fact, and unhesitatingly declare that this is one of the common errors which the present age at least is likely to explode. “No allegation,” says the author of *Spiritual Despotism*, “can stand more fully contradicted by the records of antiquity than does this; nor can anything be more easy than to disprove the assertion. We must, in charity, impute extreme ignorance to those who have professed to think that the political establishment of Christianity was the cause of its corruption.”* Ecclesiastical history furnishes us with sufficient evidence that the corruption charged upon the Christian Religion as the particular effect of its establishment by Constantine, had commenced long before, and that even the Apostolic age was not free from many heresies against which we find the first preachers of Christianity most sedulous in guarding their converts. It can indeed be safely asserted that such was the vast influence of the surrounding irreligion and idolatry, united with the internal dissensions and heresies in the Church itself, in the days of Constantine, that, without the benefit of his imperial protection, the corruption that existed would rather have been augmented than diminished. “There would certainly,” says Milner, “have been this remarkable difference, namely, that half of the Roman world, without the aid of the magistrate,

* p. 151.

would have remained destitute of even the form of Christianity."*

In contradiction to the opinion sometimes also advanced that, so far from there being any advantage to vital religion from the fostering protection of the State, a condition of suffering and persecution is, as a general rule, more congenial to its spiritual advancement, we may cite the declaration in the Acts regarding the Apostolic Churches, that "they had *rest* and were *edified*, and walking in the fear of the Lord and the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were *multiplied*."†

It may be remarked as an historical fact bearing upon the question, that the revenues of the Church, antecedent to the days of Constantine when no State provision was afforded, were far greater in amount and value, through the pious donations of the wealthy, than would have induced the clergy to accept of any compromise from the imperial government which would have secured to them a definite maintenance. Altho' this was a state of things peculiar to the times and not to be expected as a general rule applying to all conditions of the church in every age, it is sufficient to say that the court patronage at that period, if productive of any corruption at all, was not so through the means so universally alleged,—by what has usually been termed the pecuniary bribe of a State provision. An author, already frequently quoted, declares, in contradiction to a commonly received opinion upon this point, that "it may on the most substantial grounds be affirmed that it was the want of a well-devised Church and State system,—*the want*

* Church History, vol.2, p. 219.

† Acts ix. 31.

of an establishment, which made the revolution at court in the time of Constantine, in favor of Christianity, extensively and lastingly injurious to the Church."*

In the times which followed, when a cloud of gloom overshadowed the literary world and gave to several successive centuries the expressive appellation of the "dark ages," if it be asked, says an eloquent writer, "by what causes it happened that a few sparks of ancient learning survived through this long winter, we can only ascribe their preservation to *the Establishment of Christianity*." † And setting aside the condition of the unconverted world, there are facts to prove that in the case of those Churches which did not possess the advantage of legal protection and where the direct benefits of an establishment did not extend, Christianity did not bear up against the gathering darkness; and that it was only in those which enjoyed that advantage that "religion made a bridge, as it were, across the chaos, and linked the two periods of ancient and modern civilization." ‡

To the often asserted objection that the alliance between Church and State is *unnatural*, it might be sufficient to reply that this has never been proved. But adopting that opinion, we must necessarily regard the State, in its abstract position, either as anti-christian, or as possessing nothing within itself consentaneous to the natural operations of Christianity. If this hostility to amalgamation necessarily exist between the civil and ecclesiastical polity, it would not be

* Spirit. Despotism, p. 198.

† Hallam: Middle Ages, Vol. 3, p. 335.

‡ Hallam, *ibid*.

too much to assert that there could be no proper congruity between the work of religion and the ordinary business of life; that the private, as much as the magisterial, capacity of any man must, upon this principle, be inconsistent with the allied influence of religion. The necessary existence of this asserted opposition would seem indeed to imply that the man who is a Christian in his closet, must be an infidel upon the throne or the bench ;—nay more, that the character of Christianity applies only to the direct exercise of its peculiar duties, and is inconsistently assumed in the pursuit, for example, of an ordinary mechanical art or literary labour! No terms of rebuke or ridicule can, I conceive, be too strong for a position involving so many monstrous conclusions as this.

The natural influence of religion upon the State, and the admitted benefits of its operations upon those principles of good order and general morality which it is the business of a State to maintain and promote, would rather demonstrate that nothing can be more *natural* than an alliance between them. And with the impression from which a Christian people cannot be free, that irreligion and impiety in a nation will provoke the vengeance of Almighty God and produce national visitations from his hand, how can the state fail to recognize and act upon the duty to render religion prevalent and respected among its subjects? But if an alliance between the Church and State were a thing unnatural and unlawful, the fulfilment of such a duty would be attended with difficulties not to be surmounted, at least as long as such a position was maintained.

I shall merely add, in relation to the alleged injurious influence of State patronage upon re-

ligion,—more particularly as inducing laxity and degeneracy in those who enjoy the means of prosecuting their ministerial labours independent of the popular will,—that the same objection must assuredly apply to establishments that are intended for the advancement of *ordinary education*. Nor can I here forbear expressing my astonishment that the opponents of all State provision for a Church, and the advocates of the voluntary principle in religion, in this country, should have failed to discern the contradiction which their arguments evince when, at the same moment, they contend for the necessity of such provision for the advancement of common learning, and avow the inefficiency of the voluntary principle for accomplishing that important end. This contradiction will strike us as the more glaring when we recal to mind the argument of Dr. Chalmers, and recollect that, in the case of general education, the desire and the demand more directly urges to the ordinary methods of supply than in the “things hoped for and unseen” of religion.

It has been urged that the extensive prevalence of dissent is an argument against the soundness of establishments, and an evidence of their inherent tendency to corruption and decay. Without dwelling upon the fact that there is no human institution unaccompanied with a similar manifestation of dissent,—nay, that the Christian religion itself, even in its fundamental principles, has some opponents in every Christian land ;—without dilating upon the weakness which this argument experiences from the circumstance that dissent itself is divided ;—we would ask whether the numerous and vigorous shoots which we discern from the root of many a noble tree is an infallible evidence of its approaching decay ; and

we might go on with the further question, whether, if the parent trunk were cut away, its numerous and clustered progeny would ever, in graceful strength of body or expansiveness of limb, stand forth the same ornament to the landscape, afford the same refuge to the winged wanderers of the air, or yield to the wearied the same refreshing shadow?

I believe the sentiment is sometimes hazarded by the opponents of Establishments, that *public opinion*—the *vox populi*—is against the connection of the Church with the State. In contradiction to this idea it will, I think, be very generally conceded, at least by competent judges, that the sentiment thus expressed by Burke is as applicable to the present as it was to his own times;—that “the majority of the people of England, so far from thinking a religious establishment unlawful, hardly think it lawful to be without one.” Take the world at large, and it can most confidently be affirmed that even at the present day the *vox populi* is not against the principle of an ecclesiastical establishment. And where, in the excepted instances, such an objection may be supposed nationally to prevail, there is either a prejudice to awaken it from its supposed incompatibility with the peculiar mode of their civil polity, as in the United States of America, or, as in our own country, no proper opportunity has been afforded to ascertain the legitimate influence upon the public mind of an impartial and enlightened discussion of the subject. Here both the discussion and the objections have been partial; advanced chiefly for serving the purposes of some political struggle, and almost solely confined to that most fluctuating and least infallible of all ephemeral productions, the periodical press. We may ask with a popular writer, already fre-

quently adduced,* “whether the qualities that usually call men into the service of this species of literature are a genuine intelligence and a high sense of duty and principle ; or whether they are not faculties which are seldom combined with vigorous good sense, or with expansive views, or with substantial acquirements, *and never almost with fervent and humble piety?*”—and we can say, with the same writer, that “ruled either by immediate consideration of profit or looked upon as the means of upholding and furthering particular interests, a philosophic impartiality can by no means find place in works of this class.”

In short, the secret of the hostility against establishments of religion is to be looked for in the camp of Infidelity. Were these opponents of Christianity persuaded, as many of its disciples profess to be, that a Church Establishment is subversive of the interests of vital religion, they would gladly afford their countenance to the suicidal device, and not stand forth, as they do, the steady and uncompromising enemies of a system which they believe to contain the certain means of effecting the overthrow of the faith it was appointed to defend. But this wariness of the common enemy many conscientious Dissenters have discerned ; and they are alive to the conviction that in the fall of the Establishment is involved more than the *probable* overthrow of all the pure and undefiled religion in the land.

I have thus far, Sir, confined myself to the *principle* of Religious Establishments, and have laboured to shew,—without entering into their minuter operations and minor details—that they are institutions which possess the combined sup-

* Author of Spiritual Despotism.

port of Scripture, reason, and expediency. Having established this point—as, without the assumption of any other merit than a discernment of the native force of truth, I trust I have done—I shall proceed to offer briefly some suggestions as to the best manner of conferring upon the Church of England in this Province the benefits of that ecclesiastical provision which our Constitutional Act supplies. And here I shall not intrude one observation upon the *legality* of the claim which the Church of England prefers, convinced that it rests upon a basis which no argument of mine could strengthen; nor shall I, by alluding to any other channels for the appropriation of this property, trespass upon that delicate ground of *expediency*, upon which the present generation, in violation especially of any established principle or vested right, are I conceive scarcely justified in undertaking the responsibility of deciding.

Viewing the present demands, and contemplating the future religious wants of this rising Province, it is not too much to assume that each Township—embracing as it does about 100 square miles and capable of sustaining a population of at least 10,000 souls—would at no very distant period employ the active services of at least two clergymen of the Church of England. There is scarcely a settled township in the Province where the ministrations of *one* would not, at the present moment, be gladly welcomed;* so that there is no extravagance in the anticipation that *two* would, in the course of a few years, be employed in the same sphere with equal acceptance and utility.

* Of this fact the Bishop of Quebec, if called upon, could afford the most convincing testimony.

For the more permanent and secure maintenance of the clergy thus appointed, I would suggest, as an obvious dictate of prudence, an inalienable allotment of land to each respectively ;—from two hundred to six hundred acres according to the value of the land as affected by local circumstances. Until the revenue from these landed endowments became adequate to the maintenance of such clergymen, respectively, an annual stipend of not less than £100 should be allotted to each, payable from the general fund derived from the interest of monies vested from sales and from the annual rents of lands not set apart as specific endowments ;—this annual stipend to be subject to partial reductions at certain intervals, proportionate to the augmentation of income accruing from the landed appropriation. And in order to remove all chance of the deprecated evil of inordinate wealth in the future clergy, a provision might be established by which the surplus of any income exceeding, we may say for example, £500 per annum and derived from the landed endowment, should be paid over to the general fund, to be appropriated to the maintenance of a third rectory in the township, or otherwise as circumstances at the time might require.

But as the constitution of the Church of England implies the necessity of clerical supervision, a provision should, at the same time, be established for the maintenance of the episcopal office. For this purpose I would suggest the special appropriation of 10,000 acres ; upon the principle that, hereafter, one Bishop would no more be sufficient for the Province of Upper Canada than a single clergyman for one extensive and populous township. Until the above allotment became sufficiently productive, an adequate appro-

priation from the general fund already alluded to ought annually to be assigned for this object ;— and to guard against the possibility of extravagant wealth in the future holders of the episcopal office, it might be enacted that all surplus revenue above £1500 per annum to an individual Bishop, from this source, should be paid into the general fund, to be appropriated to the support of a second or third Bishop, as the circumstances of the country might require.

It will be seen that the remarks I have offered pre-suppose the *sale* of a very considerable portion of the Clergy Reserves. For immediate efficiency rather than for prospective benefit is such a step to be recommended ; but with the belief that, upon the former ground, this would be advisable, I would suggest the expediency of causing a special sale, perhaps of 20 or 30,000 acres, to be made for the specific purpose of forming a fund to aid in the erection of Parsonage or Glebe-Houses. The possession of such is absolutely essential to the ordinary comfort of every incumbent ; and the annexation to a mission or parish of a commodious abode will hereafter, as it does often now, compensate for many of the inconveniences consequent upon a straitened income.

This, Sir, constitutes the outline of the plan which, as the result of my knowledge of the country and of its spiritual necessities, I feel induced to offer for public consideration. I trust it will possess the merit at least of simplicity ; with the means of bringing the plan itself into operation, should it be approved. I do not feel that I need trespass upon your attention by offering any remarks. I shall confine myself to one further observation, that the plan proposed is not chargeable with the imputation of unreasonable demand. It requires not the appropriation to one object

of such a quantity of the property in question as would preclude the exercise of that more extended bounty which the constituted guardians of our rights and privileges, civil and religious, may feel themselves called upon to apportion ; while the supply of Clergy of the Church of England which the plan suggested would provide for, would still leave open a wide field for the religious ministrations of other preachers of Christianity.

In conclusion I must observe—what the candid and impartial cannot fail to concede—that in this manner of supplying religious instruction to the people of this Province to all future generations, there does not exist the possibility of its proving grievous or oppressive to any class of people. While it places the means of affording and perpetuating that most important instruction upon a foundation not to be affected by the mutabilities of the popular will, the civil and religious rights of all are, in their fullest integrity, respected and preserved. The operations of a system thus constituted, with that vigilant supervision which the system itself involves, cannot fail, with the blessing of the great Head of the Church, to produce that result which should be the object of the prayers and efforts of every Christian, “GLORY TO GOD IN THE HIGHEST, AND ON EARTH PEACE, GOOD-WILL TOWARDS MEN.”

I have the honor to be, Sir,

Your faithful humble servant,

A. N. BETHUNE.

RECTORY, COBOURG, }
Nov. 24th, 1835. }

